

Hon Ian Hunter MLC

To: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Subject: Inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009.

I am a Member of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of South Australia and I have been living with my partner for more than 18 years in a marriage-like relationship.

At the time of the ABS 2006 census, 50,000 Australians were living in loving, caring same-sex de facto relationships. Australia prides itself on being a tolerant, inclusive country – and it is about time that this was the reality for all members of our society.

I am pleased about recent changes that have taken place on a Federal level to increase equality for same-sex couples. However, the reality is that whilst full rights are not afforded to same-sex couples, we still have to put up with second-class status – and full rights means the right to marriage.

I fully support the objectives of the Bill as it stands – it is a Bill which is long overdue.

A recent survey by Galaxy found that 60 per cent of Australians support same-sex marriage; and the rate of support continues to grow with each passing opinion poll. I understand that some members of the Australian Parliament may be reluctant to support this legislation – but the reality is that as time passes, more and more Australians are prepared to support marriage equality.

Furthermore, many countries and jurisdictions around the world are legislating for marriage equality: a number of countries, I might add, with which Australia likes to compare itself favourably.

On a personal level – I want to get married. I know that I could travel overseas and do it, but like most people, I want to celebrate my love and my life surrounded by my friends and family.

When I told my family I was gay, almost 30 years ago now – it didn't go well. I was forced to leave home and relations were strained for a time. But over the years my family has moved on and embraced me and my life with my partner and his family.

We are a family and Christmas dinner is now at our home every year – my family and his, together.

The story of my family cannot be much different from that of most Australian families. And I believe it is also reflected across the Australian community – we have all grown more accepting over the years.

And I believe it is time our Australian parliament moved to reflect those changes in our society by broadening marriage to include all of us.

I am yet to hear an adequate response to why marriage should be confined to being between a man and a woman. The response that this form of 'traditional marriage' should be retained because of the biblical tradition doesn't hold much water for all of us who have no interest in getting married in a church – and last year, that was more than 60 per cent of all couples who exchanged vows.

The ability to bear and raise children is another reason often given for standing against gay marriage. I know plenty of gay parents who are wonderful parents; and I know plenty of straight couples who don't have children, either through choice or circumstance. So that doesn't hold up either as an argument.

Some have also argued that the sanctity of marriage will somehow be threatened by same-sex marriage. To my mind, though, that says more about their view of heterosexual marriage than it does about the status of same-sex marriage.

I understand the current political situation and am not hopeful that this Bill will be successful. However, it is important to open up this debate. Through continued discussion – and argument – I do believe that opposition will evaporate over time. So – the sooner we start, the better.

Please accept this letter as my submission to this inquiry and part of the community debate.

Regards

Ian Hunter
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Parliament of South Australia